

The Labors of Hercules

(Worked Over in Easy-Going Verse)



BY J. EDMUND V. COOKE.

IN ancient Greece, long time ago, a man was born — or, maybe, I ought to say a god was born — or, better yet, a baby. His father's name was Jupiter; Alcmena was his mother, Who vowed he was "the sweetest pet," and "never such another!" But Juno, queen of all the gods, pretended not to know it; She did n't like young Hercules, and straight-way sought to show it. She sent two horrid, monstrous snakes, to eat him in his cradle, Which reptiles found him sitting eating sugar with a ladle. They smiled to see how sweet he 'd be, but lo! the boy gave battle: He killed them both, and used their tails to make a baby-rattle.

Then Juno let him thrive in peace; but, after he was grown, He found that she had kept him from a kingdom and a throne. Eurystheus obtained these plums, but night and day was haunted By tales of mighty Hercules—the hero and undaunted! So, after some deep thinking, Eurystheus planned to send him To do a dozen labors, any one of which might end him.

LABOR I.

THE Nemean lion, accustomed to ravage The country around, being voted too savage, Our hero was sent to remove him from Earth, With no arms save the two that he had at his birth.

Brave Hercules blocks up one hole of the den
And enters the other. A silence, and then
Comes a growl, and a roar, and a rush, and
a shock—



Like waves in a tempest they struggle and rock,
Till Hercules wins the renowned "strangle-lock,"

And the lion goes down like a log or a post,
Repents of his sins, and so gives up the ghost.

LABOR II.

THERE lived at that epoch, according to story,
A terrible monster, whose principal glory
Consisted of heads, which a strict inventory
Declared to be nine; and one of the same
Was as deathless as Jove, so authorities claim.



Nothing daunted, our Hercules went forth to
fight it;

He cut off one head, and two others were
sighted.

And thus the solution appeared to his view:

VOL. XXIV.—6.

"When you take one from one, the result will
be two."

Rather taken aback, but still thoroughly game,
He called his hired help, Iolaus by name.
Then he shaved off the heads as a man would
a beard,
And the necks (by his servant) were carefully
seared,
Till the deathless head soon was left grinning
alone,
And that one he buried beneath a big stone.

LABOR III.

THE Arcadian stag was a curious kind,
Golden-horned, brazen-hoofed, and could out-
run the wind;
Whoever pursued him was soon left behind.



The mandate was given to capture him living,
So our hero set out without any misgiving.
All over the kingdom he followed the brute,
Till a year was consumed in the useless
pursuit.

"Confound you!" said Hercules, seizing his bow,
"I've got something here which I'll wager
can go

As fast as two stags." And it proved to be so.
The arrow succeeded in laying him low.
The wound was n't fatal, so Hercules caught
him,
And into the king's haughty presence he
brought him.

LABOR IV.

THE boar of Erymanthus was *de trop*,
Which is French for saying how
Bores are looked on, even now.



Our hero ran the rascal through the snow,
Snared him neatly in a net,
Picked him up, like any pet,
And took him to the Capital, to add him to
the show.

LABOR V.

AUGEAS, King of Elis, it appears,
Had several thousand oxen in his stable,
But had n't cleaned the place for thirty years.
The hard taskmaster heard, pricked up his
ears,
And cried, "Ho, ho! my Hercules, you 're
able
To do great things. I give you just one day
For this spring cleaning." Stranger to dismay,
Our hero sought the stables of Augeas,
Turned into them the river named Alpheus,
And reënforced it with the swift Peneus.

These brooms soon swept the dirt away, you
have my word.
Perhaps they swept the stables with it. That
I have n't heard.



LABOR VI.

THE Stymphalian birds were a horrible lot,
And everyone thought
That they ought
To be shot;



Yet no one could do it, till Hercules brought
His little snake-rattle to set them to flying,
And then popped them over by only half try-
ing.

LABOR VII.

A BULL, sent by Neptune to die in his honor,
Not having been killed, was made mad by the
donor.
Eurystheus must have been running a "Zoo,"
And having the stag and the boar, wanted, too,
The mad bull of Crete; so he ordered "Go,
get him!"



Though Hercules never so much as had met
him.
But the hero set sail,
Grabbed the bull by the tail,

And took him to Hellas; but not for the
Garden,
For, having arrived, he then (begging his par-
don
Because he had given his tail such a pull)
Set him free — and all Greece was as mad as
the bull.

LABOR VIII.

DIOMEDES

Used to feed his
Mares on human flesh.
Hercules just cut him up,
Found the mares inclined to sup,
And fed him to them, fresh. —
'T was a most successful plan,
Though before they liked a man
More than oats or anything,



Strange to say, this master diet
Made them docile, kind, and quiet,
To be taken to the king.

LABOR IX.

THE Amazon queen had a beautiful belt.
'T was given by Mars; and the queen justly
felt
Quite proud of the trifle; but Hercules started
To see if the belt and queen could n't be
parted.
At first it appeared he had only to ask
To receive it; but this was too easy a task
To please Mrs. Juno, who stirred up a bolt
In the ranks of the Amazons. When the re-
volt
Was reported to Hercules, he rather thought

The queen was a traitress, and covertly
wrought



To undo him; so, seizing the girdle he sought,
He slew her, and thus was it bloodily bought.
Which shows that a man may be brave as
the best,
And yet ungallant when it comes to a test.

LABOR X.

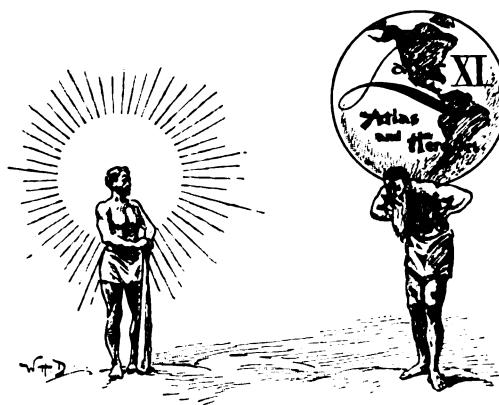
GERYONES had a fine herd of red cattle,
With a two-headed dog and a giant, to battle
With any who trespassed upon his domain.
Dog, owner, and keeper, were met and were
slain,
Yet Hercules still had to fight heavy odds
(A number of men and a parcel of gods);
But in spite of them all, he conducted the
string



Of handsome red beasts to his brute of a king.

LABOR XI.

WHEN Juno was married, the goddess of Earth
Presented some apples of excellent worth,
Made all of fine gold



From the smooth, shiny skin to the pips in the core.

(Alas! I am told
Such beautiful apples don't grow any more.)

But wealth is a worry. Nobody need doubt it, Unless, like myself, he is always without it. And Juno was worried until she grew pale; Her nectar was flat, her ambrosia was stale. The fear of a burglar had entered her head, And so every night she looked under the bed. No matter what Jupiter argued or said, She'd wake him at midnight, to vow and declare

There must be an apple-thief round about there.

At last, growing tired of the worry and wear, She placed them in care
Of the sisters Hesperides, living just where
The sun sets at night.

Our hero met Atlas, who held up the height
Of the heavens in air,
And a bargain was struck that the hero should bear

The dome for a while, and the action should earn

The apples, which Atlas brought back in return.
Though I can't understand

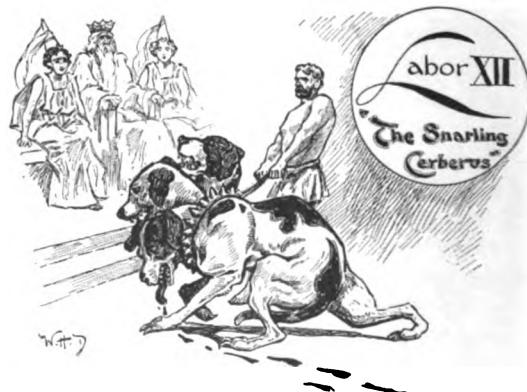
Why a chap with a chance to steal apples at hand,

Scot-free of all blame,
Should so lose his head
As to give up his claim
And let somebody else do it for him instead.

LABOR XII.

PLUTO, in his world below,
Had a great three-headed beast
Called a dog. Perhaps 't was so,
But I doubt his breed, at least.
House-dog? Hardly. Poison-drops
Fell from out his gaping chops,
And his fangs were sharp as hate,
And he guarded Pluto's gate.

Hercules was told to fetch
This repulsive, savage wretch.
Hercules with little fuss
Seized the snarling Cerberus,
Took him to the Earth from Hades,
Scared the king in playful sport,
Showed him round to all the court,
Made him bark for all the ladies.
Then the hero let him go,
And he sank to realms below,
One head growling,
One head howling,
One head yowling,
As mythology rehearses.



And the fun
Of the Labors—all was done.
So are these doggerel verses.